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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Developments in Indochina

State Dept. review completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

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Viet Cong members of the truce team were harassed at Hue. Official Saigon reporting of Communist holdings in the countryside may be understated.		25X1
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SOUTH VIETNAM

Members of the North Vietnamese delegation to the regional Four-Party Joint Military Commission (JMC) were pelted with eggs and other objects following a visit to the ICCS office in Hue on 15 February, the third such incident during the past week. Neither of the two officials involved in the fracas were injured. After what was possibly a deliberate delay, South Vietnamese military police intervened by clearing the way for the Communists to return to the JMC compound.

The government is investigating this incident, and may be issuing new instructions designed to keep displays of anti-Communist sentiment under control. The recent appearance of a crowd carrying rocks and effigies in a district of Binh Dinh Province, however, suggests that sporadic popular outbursts directed against Communist representatives will continue, particularly as the teams move out to the 26 subregional JMC offices. [REDACTED]

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Who Controls What?

There is some evidence that Communist holdings in the countryside may be more extensive in certain areas than is being officially acknowledged by the government. During the past week, reports from both American observers [REDACTED] have pointed out discrepancies in the official South Vietnamese appraisals of the local security situation.

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In the delta, for example, [REDACTED]

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although the security picture has improved since the Communist cease-fire offensive, the province chief there is badly distorting the situation. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the Communists held an estimated 76 hamlets before the cease-fire. This has been reduced

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to 46, but the province chief officially claims that no hamlets are under Communist control. The 46 hamlets contain a little less than 10 percent of the province's total population of 563,000.

In Chuong Thien, another delta province, the government's local security evaluation shows that only 13 hamlets are considered to be Viet Cong. American officials in the province report that the Communist control 53 of Chuong Thien's hamlets; they held 25 prior to the cease-fire. The province's senior American official believes that when international supervisory personnel arrive, the Viet Cong will claim control over considerably more territory in Chuong Thien than is generally expected.

Reports from Military Region (MR) 2 also show some discrepancies. National police figures for Phu Yen Province list only 24 hamlets as contested or under enemy control. US officials in the province, updating a local security survey for December, report that the Communists now hold 27 hamlets and have enough presence in 27 more to threaten government control. These 54 hamlets represent about 14 percent of the province's estimated 326,000 people.

General Lu Mong Lan, inspector general for South Vietnam's Joint General Staff, told an American official that he is aware province chiefs have not fully reported the extent of Communist presence in local areas. Moreover, he claimed that some hamlet chiefs, contrary to instructions, have allowed unarmed Communist cadre to enter certain localities, ostensibly to live peacefully in the hamlets and befriend the residents.

The South Vietnamese are understandably sensitive about admitting to Viet Cong control in any area of South Vietnam. As more American military advisers and observers are withdrawn from the field, however, data on the status of local security will come almost exclusively from South Vietnamese figures, and

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it is probably fair to assume that this data will tend to portray the government's local security position in the best possible light. Although the evidence is substantial that Viet Cong control is more extensive than admitted by the government, there is as yet insufficient data, even from South Vietnamese sources, to indicate how serious the discrepancy is on a nationwide basis.

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Opposition Senators Seek Special Session

Opposition and independent senators are trying to convene a special Senate session to debate the national situation following the cease-fire agreement

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and to seek amendment of the presidential decree on political parties. The constitution states that a third of the Senate membership may request such a session, and the necessary number have already signed up. Senate Chairman Huyen has not yet indicated when such a meeting might be held. In addition to their unhappiness over the decree on parties, many senators are increasingly frustrated because the National Assembly has not played any role since the cease-fire agreement. The legislature does not meet again in regular session until April.

The opposition is expected to seek a relaxation of the decree's stiff membership requirements for political parties and to try to extend the deadline of 27 March. One independent senator is trying to arrange a compromise that would avoid a stormy debate on the Senate floor, but some political leaders apparently remain bitter toward President Thieu for issuing the decree. Although Thieu has recently acknowledged to some political figures that he is considering modifying the decree on his own, some of his critics remain skeptical that the President will agree to any changes.

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Military Situation

There has been little change in the military situation. In southern Quang Ngai Province, South Vietnamese ranger units have breached Communist defenses a few miles north of Sa Huynh, but are encountering heavy artillery fire. The US Embassy reports that the Quang Ngai provincial council is disturbed over the government's handling of military operations near Sa Huynh and intends to call on the province chief to develop a plan for the "rapid reconquest" of the area. Normally, provincial councils take no role in large military operations;

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the concern of the council probably indicates fairly widespread public apprehension over Communist gains around Sa Huynh. In the southern provinces, military activity remains focused for the most part in the western delta region adjacent to Cambodia.

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New Reconciliation Policy

The government has taken a more flexible position on its political terms for dealing with the Khmer insurgents. A new policy of "national reconciliation" was outlined by First Minister Hang Thun Hak

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Its most important feature is a provision to hold general elections for the Senate and the National Assembly with all political parties--including the insurgents--participating. Although Hak did not specify when such elections would be held, Information Minister Keth Reth told the press on 15 February that the government would not attempt to open negotiations with the insurgents until after the Paris Conference on Indochina convenes on 26 February.

There were two important conditions for the election set forth by Hak: the prior withdrawal of all North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops and the exclusion of Sihanouk from any role in negotiations and presumably the election. Hak also said that the government's plan entails the re-establishment of the International Control Commission, presumably to supervise the withdrawal of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops and to oversee new elections.

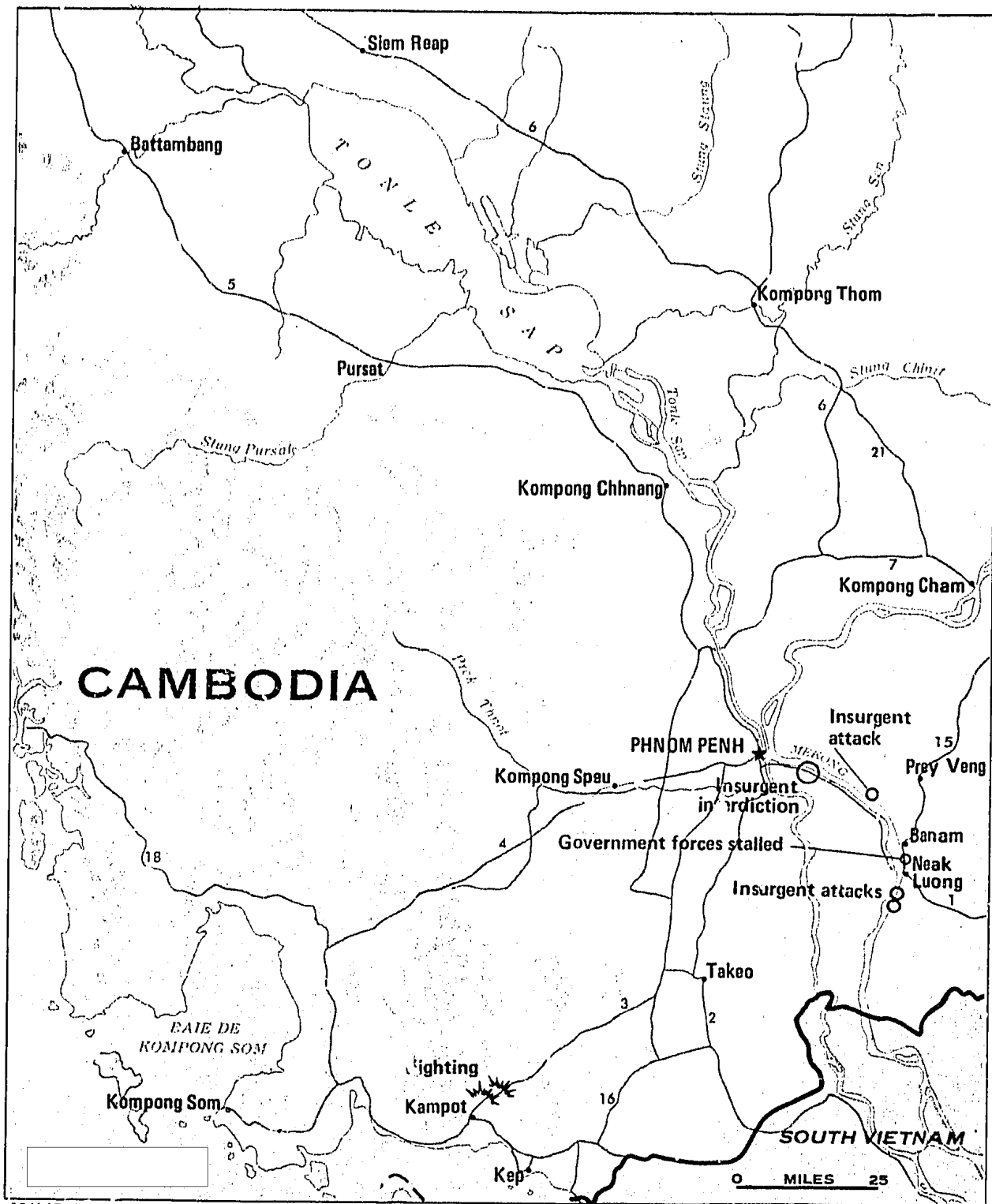
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Until now, the government's only approach to the insurgent problem has been an ineffective rallier program. Although the insurgents have steadfastly opposed any political compromise with the Lon Nol government, the anti-Sihanouk faction within the insurgent movement may be tantalized by the possibility of a political solution that excludes Sihanouk.

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The Military Situation

Government efforts to retake Banam and to re-open Route 15 between Neak Luong and Prey Veng are still stalled by stiff Khmer insurgent opposition. The counteroffensive in this area has also been hampered by disciplinary problems. Two Cambodian battalions that had been participating in the operation had to be withdrawn on 14 February because they refused to fight. The insurgents are keeping up harassing attacks on small outposts north of Banam and south of Neak Luong and on forces trying to clear a four-mile section of Route 1 between Phnom Penh and the Mekong. In the past few days, 12 government troops have been killed and 100 wounded in the fighting along Route 1.

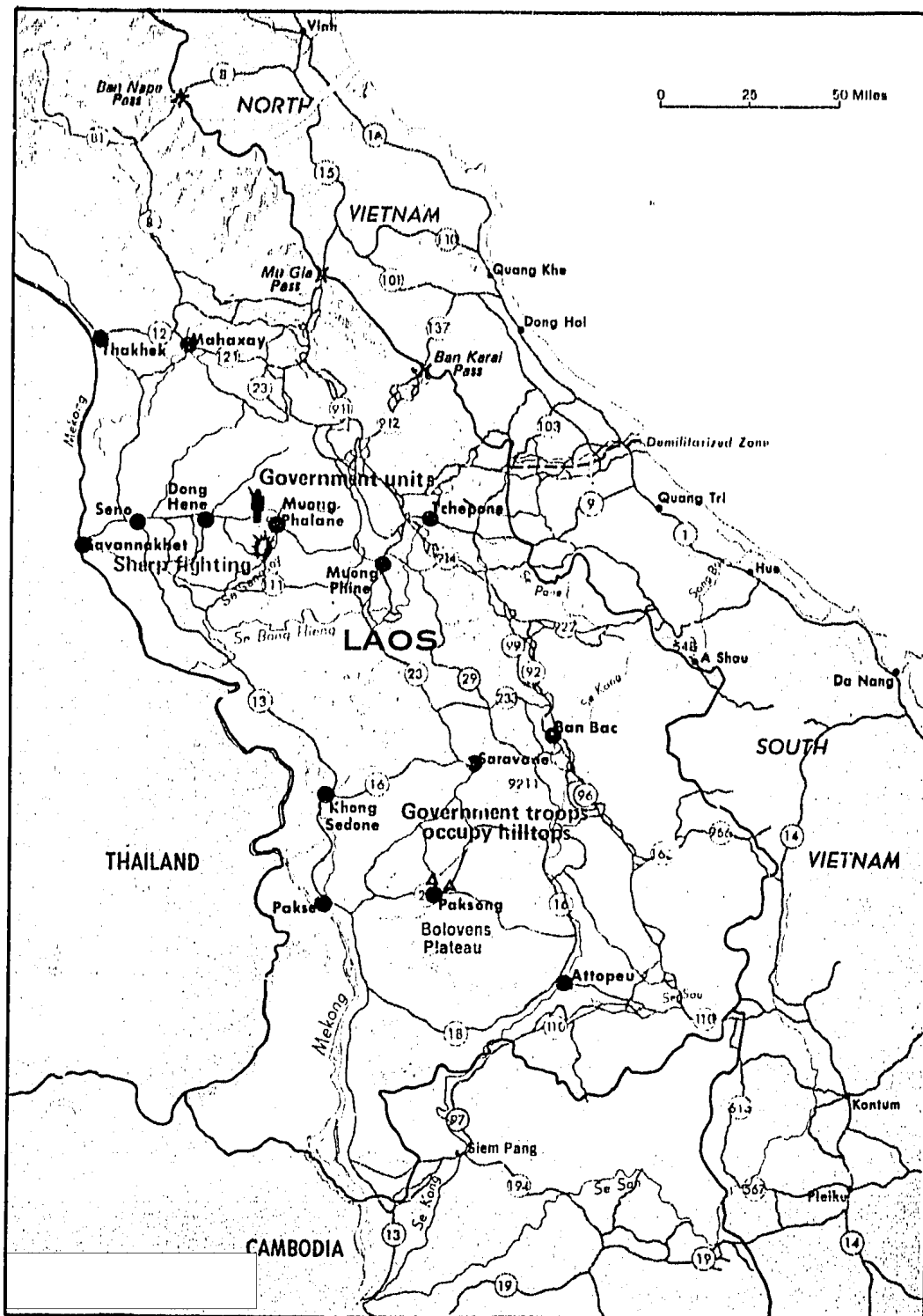
The Cambodians have also taken some fairly heavy losses in the southwest that resulted from a flare-up of attacks against government positions in the vicinity of Kampot City. These are the first significant enemy actions in this area in many months. The government has nine battalions defending the region between Kampot and the former coastal resort at Kep.

Elsewhere, government units from Takeo met no opposition on 14 February when they moved down Route 2 toward the South Vietnam border. Although the southern leg of the highway is open, that portion between Phnom Penh and Takeo apparently is closed. In the north, there has been some improvement in the situation at Kompong Thom. Insurgent harassing attacks seem to be diminishing, and the government garrison in the isolated town has been airdropped two tons of ammunition.

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● Government-held location ● Communist-held location

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LAOS

Government irregulars moved in behind air strikes on 14 February to occupy positions atop two hills overlooking Paksong on the Bolovens Plateau, but were unable to dislodge enemy troops entrenched on a third hilltop.

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In the central panhandle, Communist artillery crews on 14 February shelled units west of Muong Phalane, and a battalion of the North Vietnamese 29th Regiment braved air strikes to cross the Se Sangsoy and routed an irregular battalion south of the town. Most Communist units, however, are still east of the river.

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NORTH VIETNAM

Party First Secretary Le Duan visited military units and the local populace in Quang Binh Province and the Vinh Linh Special Zone in the southern part of North Vietnam during Tet, according to recent Hanoi radio broadcasts. Le Duan had high praise for logistic units engaged in moving supplies south to the battlefields, but he also cautioned that they could not rest on past accomplishments because "the revolutionary undertaking is not yet completed," and more sacrifices would be necessary before final victory is achieved and the country is united.

Le Duan spent much of his time with the "Quang Trung Army Group"--almost certainly the North Vietnamese 559th Transportation Group, the unit that has overseen the logistics effort since 1959. Le Duan talked to several logistic units subordinate to the 559th, including the one responsible for delivering supplies to Communist forces in South Vietnam's Quang Tri Province. He acknowledged that the "Quang Trung" group had "struggled hard in the Truong Son Mountains for 13 long years and fulfilled the task of aiding the frontline, in defiance of all hardships and dangers." Le Duan credited logistic units with having made a significant contribution "to our people's great victory" of getting the US out of Vietnam.

In an unusual bit of public candor, Le Duan admitted that despite the regime's "correct and creative political, military, and diplomatic line," victory would be impossible without "a nation endowed with the traditions of stalwartness, bravery, resourcefulness, and vividness," and without adequate motivation among all 40 million Vietnamese. Le Duan's pitch was doubtless aimed in part at acknowledging the tremendous sacrifices his listeners had already made, while calling for more of the same. He may also have been hinting, however, that the southern Communists' failure to achieve final victory could be attributed to their own inadequate motivation and not to an erroneous line or inadequate support from the North.

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Le Duan noted that "some" people wanted to relax now that a measure of victory had been achieved. He urged continued discipline and devotion to the party line and called on his listeners to honor the "scores of thousands of compatriots and comrades" who had sacrificed themselves by practicing humility and learning how to "live in love."

Le Duan also visited the people living in the areas next to the Demilitarized Zone and told them much the same thing. In addition, he called on southerners who are now living in the North to assist in production and do their part so that the revolution will succeed.

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)--Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines--have decided not to press for the convening of a regional conference on post-war developments in Southeast Asia. A joint communique issued at the end of the ministerial meeting on 15 February in Kuala Lumpur expressed the desire to expand ASEAN into a regional forum that includes Burma and the states of Indochina, but acknowledge that efforts in this direction would have to be postponed until "an appropriate time in the future." The communique's soft-pedaling of this question suggests a consensus within ASEAN that any such broad regional meeting would be neither feasible nor productive pending clarification of the political and military situation throughout Indochina.

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